



A GIRL OF GRIT.

BY MAJOR ARTHUR GRIFFITHS.

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Communicate with signal stations down the Thames, and then with those on the east and southeast coasts, and inquire for a yacht answering this description—it is the Fleur-de-Lis, in fact. She is registered here; you can verify her from the books. Ask if she has been seen or spoken with, and if so, what course she is on. That won't take half an hour. In the meantime, you might be inquiring for a steamer to send in chase. That is your idea, is it not? and again he signaled in a desk tube, summoning another subordinate.

"Can anything come of it?" asked Sir Charles doubtfully. "Why not? You will, of course, have to send a posse of police in her. It will not be enough to overhaul her, you will have also to overawe the abductors—always supposing you come up with and can positively identify the Fleur-de-Lis, neither of which is very probable."

"It is just what I tell this young lady. We've got first to catch the boat, and then to be sure it is the Fleur-de-Lis, before we go a step farther."

"Exactly, Ah, Trevor"—this was to another clerk who now came in—"let me know with all dispatch what steamers could be hired for a special mission. Class of no consequence, but she must have a speed of 15 to 18 knots, and be ready for sea this afternoon. Price of charter by week or month, all found—crew, captain, coals on board, Sharp's the word, you understand? Who is going in her? You should have some police officers, in case there is any arrest to be made. Perhaps you will see to that, Sir Charles?"

"I should like to go in her," I now said. "My dear child," protested Sir Charles, "that is pure nonsense. In the first place, I think it is highly improbable that she will catch up the yacht. But if she does there will be some rough and tumble work—fighting perhaps. Those villains, after giving such lengths, will not be very willing to give up their prize. It would never do for you, Miss Fairholme."

"I cannot bear to remain inactive. I want to be doing something," I contended. "I expect you would be inactive enough on board the steamer," said the secretary. "Ramping up and down the waters probably, a wretched sort of cruise and always in ignorance as to what was going on at home. I think you would be wiser to find some other outlet for your energies."

"At this moment the first clerk came in with a slip of paper in his hand. "A small steam yacht, flying no colors," he read aloud, "was reported passing the North Foreland about 8 p. m. last night, and a steamer, the same no doubt, was seen from Beachy Head this morning at 5 a. m. Her course apparently W. S. W. westerly. Nothing seen of her since. Start Point and Lizard have been warned specially to look for her and report."

"She is making for the Atlantic, I expect," was the secretary's commentary. "At least that would be a fair inference. But once in the wide ocean, who shall say what will become of her?" "Could she not be intercepted from Plymouth or Falmouth?" I suggested. "What would you calculate her rate of steaming at the progress she has made?"

"It's a good suggestion, Miss Fairholme. I should imagine the yacht would be off the Start soon after midnight and Plymouth by early tomorrow morning. I could wire instructions to Lloyd's agent to send out a tug, and no doubt Sir Charles could arrange for police constables with search warrants and authority to detain the Fleur-de-Lis."

"That will I, by the Lord, and send an officer of my own besides. I have other reasons—official reasons—for

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prompt and sensible course. You would hardly get a steamer off from this or any other port under 24 hours, and that would be a fatal loss of time.

"Can I go in the tug?" I still stuck to my point. "Quite impossible," replied the secretary. "They have no proper accommodation, and you would have to pass the night in utter discomfort on the open deck."

"I should not be afraid of that. But some one who knows Mr. Wood and everything that must accompany the tug," I argued. "My officer, Swete Thornhill, knows him, doesn't he?"

"Yes, but not the others, or the meaning of the whole thing."

"Send the Yankee then. He will be quite equal to the emergency. Can you get hold of him?"

"Easily. He is on the telephone. Besides, I know his address."

"Then we left Lloyd's, having given carte blanche as regards expenditure, and with full assurance that all proper arrangements would be made. Later Mr. Snuyzer answered my summons, and was pleased to express his approval when he heard what I had done."

"I don't admire another night out of bed," he said grumblingly. "But it is in a good cause. There's sense in the plan and it may succeed. The chase was mere idiosyncrasy. You could never have caught up the yacht. Besides, I can be back in London on Saturday at latest, which is most important."

"Yes?" I asked, rather indifferently. "Yes, truly. Summary I'll sail from Southampton by the Great River line's steamer Chattahoochee for New York."

"What? Why is this? What reason—have you found out anything?"

"Here is a preliminary list of passengers by the Chattahoochee. Run your eyes over the names. See? Duke and Duchess of Tierra Sagrada."

"You are indeed wonderful, Mr. Snuyzer, and in sheer admiration I gave him my hand. "But that isn't all. Have you gone right down the list? Well?"

"My eyes swam, my head turned round, I felt giddy and faint, for there at the end of all, was the name of—'Captain William Wood'!"

"I was pretty right, you see, miss. I see all their cards as though they were on the table. The right man held up, the wrong paraded with full papers of identification to make a clean sweep of all they can acquire. It's time some one should go over. Perhaps it will be Mr. Wood himself. If I can pick him out of that booker and bring him on shore, I shall put it to him that he had better cross the pond right away to protect his own interests. That would be far the best. But some one must go."

"Mr. Snuyzer," I said, with a sudden, irresistible impulse, "if you do not return on Friday night, I will go over to New York."

Directly we sat down to lunch I broke it to mother.

"I am going to New York on Sunday," I said very quietly.

The words had no meaning for her at first. I had to repeat the statement more than once, when at last it dawned upon her.

"Of course I cannot go alone," I continued, in the same matter of fact voice, "at least, I'd rather not; so you will have to come with me. Now, darling, I went on, "don't be disagreeable. It is a matter of the utmost importance. I must go. I cannot help myself."

"It is something to do with that wretched Captain Wood, of course? Dear, dear, how I wish you had never settled it that way. I don't know what to think of him; whether we ought to trust him. Suppose he is deceiving you; suppose he has run away?"

"Mother, you must not hint at such a thing. I have unbounded faith in him, as I am sure he has in me. It is for his sake I am going, and, mother—forgive me—whatever you say or do, I shall go."

She could say nothing, and to close the matter I struck while the iron was hot and secured our passage that very afternoon, paying the deposit. Mr. Snuyzer's name was also down on the list of passengers, which was a comfort to me, for I saw that he was confident of success in his present mission. If he intercepted the yacht and rescued Willie, we need not start, mother and I, and I would gladly forfeit the deposit. What Willie would do there was no saying.

But the days passed, Friday, then Saturday, without one word of news. How I got through the time I can hardly say. Mother saw that I was wretched and, thinking I was fusing and fretting over our rash expedition, tried timidly—sweet mother!—to get me to give it up.

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break down utterly.

CHAPTER VIII.
THE S. S. CHATTAHOOCHEE.
I never felt so deserted and forlorn as when I stood on the platform at Waterloo on the Sunday morning waiting for the special train for Southampton. There was a great mob of people crowding and clamoring around us, and their friends to see them off—all strangers to me, many of them talking an uncouth, unintelligible language. The porters were too much overpowered with luggage to attend to me, and I had to look after myself. He was very fractious, dragging at his chain, yelping in short, angry snaps, with fierce snarls of teeth, and keeping every one at a distance. I cannot say what I should have done but for the kindness of a man, a gentleman who spoke with a strong Yankee twang and who found my scents. He persuaded the guard to allow me to remain in the carriage with us, and the dog was for the moment good. I don't know why I humbled myself with him, but I clung to him feebly, desperately, for no other reason than that he was Willie, the only real living link left with my dear missing friend.

"This new acquaintance was a youth, little more in a straw hat and a high check shirt, he wore no gloves and had a diamond ring on one finger and a great diamond brooch in his shirt bosom. He was not handsome, far from it—freckled face, red hair and ferret eyes and yet there were kindness, good feeling, chivalry in his face. That may be a better born gentleman might have envied him."

"Guess you're new to this kind of thing," he said affably as we started. "Never been across before?"

"Mother frowned at me from her corner as though to check this forward stranger, but I was so sure he meant well and so grateful to him for his kindness that I smiled and let him talk on.

"You see, there are a lot of big toads in this puddle, and outsiders are left a long way behind. Quite a number of swells on board the train dukes and duchesses, young millionaires that cross British capital."

My heart bounded at the names mentioned, for I knew that he was referring to the conspirators, and I asked him rather nervously if he knew any of these people by sight. I dared not tell him, of course, how deeply they interested me.

"Why, certainly; the whole hypothesis there's the Duchess of Tierra Sagrada. The title is Spanish, not much I take, like their castles. But she's an amazing fine woman, tall and had some Reckon that she's won her dukedom. She was on the boards once some Boston variety show. The duke's like a bit of dried root and black as sarsaparilla."

"And this millionaire?"

"Wood. You have heard of him? Is that so? The young English captain who got all the McLaughlin millions. I needn't show him you, guess you know him by sight?"

How was I to answer this most embarrassing question? Was it just lanceantry? Had this man any suspicion? I looked into his little blue eyes, but they never faltered, and I replied that, like the rest of the world, I had heard the story.

"He's no great shakes, you'll say, not for a British officer. Don't fit his fortune quite. It's a good deal to live up to."

"When the train ran into Southampton and we left it for the wharf where lay the little tender that was to convey us to the big liner, Mr. Rositter (my new friend's name) showed us the people he had named. We were crowded now into a narrow space, and sat almost in each other's pockets. It was easy to make out every one, and I soon learned all I wanted to know."

First, there was the arch impostor, the villain who was masquerading as my dear Willie Wood. I saw a short, thickset, vulgar looking man, very much over-dressed, smoking a long cigar, holding his head high, as though arrogance and hauteur were in his part. He was not alone; his two companions, the only persons to whom he spoke, were the Duke and Duchess of Tierra Sagrada, as my friend whispered me.

I confessed I stared at them with all my eyes, my heart beating tumultuously. If I only knew what they did! They had been with Willie—were the last to see him, probably, in the Victoria dock.

The man, a small man, thin, twisted, snake-like, and venomous, was no doubt the ring-leader, one of the prime movers in the plot. As I looked at his dark, sallow face, heavy, brooding, with dull, savage, bloodshot eyes, I trembled to think I might have to measure strength with him—that I, a weak, helpless woman, might be called upon to unmask him, and bring him to account. What chance should I have alone against these unscrupulous, murderous, coldly deliberate villains?

I got some little comfort, however, from my examination of the woman. Duchess or no duchess, accomplice and confederate or hapless tool, willing or constrained, I knew that within her poor means she had been kind to Willie, and would have helped him if she could. She was not wholly bad, I felt sure. A handsome woman, undoubtedly; very tall, with a fine figure and a beautiful face, although with a sad, worn, anxious expression—the face of one who had known some trouble. Was she vexed, harassed, tortured perchance, by a past that was irrevocable, at present hateful and intolerable, which she was powerless to mend? There could be but little sympathy between her and her husband. They hardly spoke to each other; when they did, the man seemed to snarl, and if she answered at all, it was only in sullen monosyllables. When the false Willie Wood addressed her, which he did from time to time

with an air of easy familiarity, she disdained to reply at all. It was clear the conspirators were not a happy family.

While I sat looking intently at these people and engrossed with very serious thoughts, I was disturbed by Fanshawe, my maid, who came up and said, in a very fretful, disappointed tone:

"Please, Miss Frida, I'm worried to death with this dresome dog. What-ever made you bring him is more than I can say. I can do nothing with him."

Roy had been pretty good till now, and when we got on board the tender I handed him over to Fanshawe. He had followed her very obediently from the train to the quayside, but when once embarked had shown the most unaccountable restlessness. He began queuing about the deck, dragging Fanshawe after him, for he had great strength and, besides, he growled so threateningly that she was forced to give in to him. When I took him in hand he displayed the same restless-ness. At last, in despair, she appealed to me.

I again took the leash out of her hand and tried to pacify him. As a rule I could manage him. He had taken to me long before, in the early days of our acquaintance, and now, since Willie was gone, he transferred his affection, as I hoped, to me. But now I had lost all control over him. He would not keep quiet; still much less crouch down at my feet. He disdained to obey. I tried all ways with him, spoke to him softly and sweetly, scolded him and cuffs him, but all to no purpose. He stood away from me at the longest distance his chain would allow, as if we were utter strangers and his only idea was to break entirely away at the very first chance.

Then, just as our tender ran alongside the great liner, and I was occupied with mother and all our belongings, he made one great snatch at his chain. It slipped through my fingers and in an instant he was gone. He ran forward to the bows of the tug, and I could hear him raging furiously along the deck through the throng with loud, quite joyous yelps, as eager as if he was rounding up a flock of scattered sheep on the mountain home of his ancestors.

In the end I saw him crossing the gangway at the fore part that put down for the second cabin passengers. He was thrusting his way through them noisily, and was one of the earliest at the ladder, which he ran up to disappear hastily into the big ship.

Directly I had installed mother into a snug place in the music room and set Fanshawe to unpack I made inquiries for the dog.

"Dog, miss?" said a passing steward. "Is he a passenger? Then the butcher will have him safe. If not, guess he is made into sausage by this time, for the chief officer's bound to have him lugged."

"I have paid for the dog's ticket, and perhaps you will be good enough to direct me to the butcher," I said sharply. "I wish to see that the dog is made comfortable."

"He'll be that, miss, sure enough, if he's peaceably disposed; otherwise Sam McKillop has a heavy hand with the rope's end."

Full of misgivings for Roy, whose cross grained nature seemed likely to get him into trouble, I went in all haste to the far stern, picking my way among all sorts of dirt till some one produced Sam McKillop, a big, burly man, with rough black beard and great, bare, hairy arms.

"That's me. Who wants Sam McKillop? Will it be you, mem?"

"It's about my dog, Mr. McKillop," I said sweetly. "A golden collie; answers to the name of Roy."

"I mind him. But did you say you, mem? I was thinking another person owned him—him as brocht him to me."

"I don't know who that could be. But I am in charge of him, and I want you to be kind to him"—I handed over a sovereign—"and to bear with him, for he has a queer temper sometimes. I hope he will give you no trouble."

"Ma certle he'll give no trouble. I'm no' fashed for that. He's dooce and quiet eneuch, I'm thinking. Cam' here like a wee lamme trotting at the heels of the chap that brocht him."

"Was it some one who caught him, do you think? I should like to know."

"Mayhap. But I thocht he owned him, the beast lippeded to him so kindly, and he lay down just at a word, as though from an old friend."

"Found out his mistake like a sensible creature, I suppose, and thought it best to settle down till he found me. Will you take me to see him, Mr. McKillop, please?"

"He's yonder, in the hutch under the bulkhead; snug in his straw, and making the best o't—a lesson to mair contrary Christians."

I followed the indication, and there was Roy lying at ease in his rude kennel; his beautiful head rested on his two fore paws, and he looked perfectly contented and happy. At my approach he barely lifted his large, sleepy eyes, but there was something like a wink

of recognition in them, accompanied by a rustle in the straw from the wagging of his ponderous tail.

This complete change in his demeanour was a pleasant surprise. I did not seek to explain it to myself, but speaking a few words of encouragement, I left him. More pressing matters called me aft. The steamer was already beyond the shelter of the land, and the sea had risen under a fast freshening summer gale.

I was not sorry to get back to my berth, and soon had no further concern with mundane affairs, or the passage of time. My only recollections of the next three days are a confused memory of acute discomfort. We were all wretchedly ill—mother, poor dear! Fanshawe, of course, and I, although hitherto I had liked the sea.

My own collapse was, no doubt, the reaction from the keen anxieties that had oppressed me before departure. They were as keen as ever now; but when I roused myself from the stupor of sickness, and crawled up on deck to breathe the magnificent ozonized air of the Atlantic, I felt revived and more fit to face them.

Some one helped me to my deck chair. It was my friend Mr. Rositter. Some one had placed it in a sheltered corner—Mr. Rositter. Some one got wraps for me, and a novel, and a deck steward with a cup of invigorating beef tea; this same some one left me in place to recover health and strength—always Mr. Rositter. I blessed the kindly, considerate chivalry of American men.

Now, as I lounged there lazily, I began to look into things a little more closely, and to consider how far I had advanced matters or served the cause by this escapade of mine.

I had felt in the very first task I had set myself, that of keeping a watch upon the conspirators. I had seen nothing of them for three days. I knew no more about them than when I had come on board, and I had no clear notion how I should act when I arrived in New York, what would be best, or what would come of anything I did. Despair and despondency seized me. I felt utterly helpless, useless, and was full of self reproach. Yet daylight was nearer than I thought. I now saw Mr. Rositter approaching and leading Roy by his chain.

"Here's some one you may be glad to see," he said pleasantly. "I got leave to give him a short run."

"You dog? What a handsome creature!" said a lady seated by my side, and, turning, I saw to my surprise it was the Duchess of Tierra Sagrada. Roy, who was a lump of conceit, perfectly understood the compliment. It was one of his well behaved days. He sat there, solemn and self satisfied, giving a paw and doing all his little tricks almost without asking, while the duchess petted and made much of him without the least protest on his part.

"Then with a quick motion of no unnatural curiosity the duchess looked at his collar. It was no doubt a civil way of finding out who I was, but the result was something of a shock to us both. For when she started back in surprise that had terror in it, I remembered that his collar still bore his master's name and regiment, 'Captain W. A. Wood, —th regiment.'

"Who are you? What does this?" she began hurriedly, but recovered herself and said, with great self-control: "You know a Captain Wood, then? We have one on board too. I wonder if they are related. You must allow me to introduce you. He is traveling with us."

Before I could answer a man stood over us and a harsh voice called her by name, but in a language I did not understand. She got up with prompt obedience, that I set down to anxiety to tell her husband (of course it was the Duke) what she had discovered. But as they walked away together he did all the talking, and from the infection I felt sure he was taking her sharply to task.

"Yes, he's rating her soundly," remarked Mr. Rositter. "Beckon not many American women would stand that sort of talk from their husbands. He's telling her she ought not to have taken up with you—that he had expressly ordered her to make no chance acquaintances. It's a queer game about that dog."

"What do you know about the dog?" I asked, quite frightened.

"Everything, Miss Fairholme. More than a little, I guess," he said, with a little laugh.

"Who are you?"

"A friend. But this is too public a place to talk in. Are you equal to a turn upon the deck? We shall be safe away aft there, and it will be supposed we are exercising the dog."

I went readily enough and was greatly comforted by what I heard. This Mr. Rositter, who had been so attentive, was an ally and agent of Mr. Snuyzer, who had been deputed to take his place in case he could not go himself by our steamer.

"I am one of Saraband's people, too, although not so high in their confidence as Saul J. He is a daisy and has won

his place by many fine operations. I am only beginning, but I hope well. Things are moving in the right direction. Before you leave this ship, before many hours pass perhaps, I shall be able to give you some startling surprises, only you must await the right time."

I could not find words to thank him and went back to my seat tremulous with excitement, yet patient and contented, willing to trust this new and most unexpected ally.

CHAPTER IX.
EN PURSUIT—MR. SNUYZER CONTINUES HIS STATEMENT TO MESSRS. SARABAND.

I left Hill street in pretty good humor, for Miss Frida Fairholme gave me a draft on account which might have won me from your employment if she wanted my services. Then I went home, and, having warned Joe Vialto to be in readiness to accompany me, I waited for my last orders. I had been told I was to be associated with a British officer, a friend of the captain's, and that he would join me right away, so we might take the cars at once for Plymouth. But my gentleman never appeared till my hour, and when he did appear he showed up as a high-falutin Jack-a-dandy whom I thought no better than a dude. But I was wrong there, and I will say at once that I cottoned to him some before we parted.

My instructions came in a letter. It was addressed to me, indorsed "immediate," in an envelope marked "On Her Majesty's Service," which I am not, as you know, and don't want to be, being a freeborn loyal subject of Uncle Sam. The letter inside was headed with the royal arms and signed "Charles Collingham, major general." It was to inform me that the steam tug Jacob Silvertown had been secured for a particular business, and would be found some night lying at the Plymouth pier-head, with fires banked, ready to go to sea at a moment's notice.

The letter went on:

I understand from Lloyd's, and it has been calculated from the admiralty charts as the basis of her speed and the progress she has made, that the yacht Fleur-de-Lis should be abreast of the Lizard about dawn or, say, 3.30 to 4 a. m. tomorrow. If the tug leaves Plymouth before midnight, she can gain such a position by daylight as to meet the Fleur-de-Lis and cross her course. If you do not sight her at once, you must be waiting, for she cannot well have passed.

When you have intercepted her, as you surely will, she will be accompanied by an officer of my department, who will accompany you and who carries the necessary authority from the lords of the admiralty to detain and search her. He is empowered to use force if necessary, and a certain number of police and coast guardsmen will be on board the tug.

Major Swete Thornhill, R. A., the bearer of this letter, will travel with you to Plymouth. He is a friend of Captain Wood's and brother staff officer and will be glad to co-operate in the rescue and render any assistance.

I found a tall, military looking gentleman at the door in a hansom.

"Hop in," he cried pleasantly. "Only just time to catch the 5 express."

I preferred to travel with Joe, but we joined forces at Paddington, where my gentleman had secured a compartment, and we started to talk over our business right away.

"Hang that fellow Willie Wood!" began the major. "Wish he was at the bottom of the sea. I was due this very night at a big feed at the Charlatae club, and I've had to spend it in the train. Got me a jawbatter, too, from the chief, for we were all out at lunch when he came in, and as I was the first back I had to take the rough edge of his tongue and came in on this ugly job. Is it all a true bill? Have they really got Master Willie in a tight place? Mean to make him walk the plank and all that, eh?"

"I told him the whole story from the beginning, at parts of which he laughed and parts looked very grave.

"Always was a garden east, Willie Wood, but a good chap—good as they make 'em. He'd give you the shirt off his back and always ready to do all your work if you'd let him. Now, 'Tid do my level best to pull him out of this, mess if I can. What chance have we? Let's see how it stands."

[20 BE CONTINUED]

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When I took him in hand he displayed the same restlessness.

